

NIEHS employees honored at NIH Director's Awards Ceremony

By Eddy Ball

Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., and 13 employees of NIEHS and NTP (see [text box](#)) were among recipients of National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director's Awards. They were presented at a ceremony June 12 in Bethesda, Maryland, organized around the theme, "Why I Love NIH." The employees were recognized for their outstanding contributions to trans-NIH initiatives in the DREAM Toxicogenetics Challenge, the Tox21 predictive toxicology consortium, remote support technology, and organization of a geroscience summit.

Leading off the ceremony was NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., who praised employees for their persistence and creativity in making fiscal year 2013-2014 a successful year for the organization, despite fiscal restraints and operational interruptions. He pointed to a long list of achievements, including a record number of Nobel prizes awarded to grantees, the BRAIN (Brain Research Through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies) Initiative, and the cooperation established with the family of Henrietta Lacks, source of the famous HeLa cell line.

"NIH was able to avoid almost all delays in the scientific review process [despite the shutdown in October 2013]," he said, noting also that patients at the NIH Clinical Center continued to receive quality care, despite the interruption of operations elsewhere. "[But] we're not out of the woods, yet," he warned.

Collins joined emcee NIH Associate Director for Communications and Public Liaison John Burklow, and NIH Deputy Director for Extramural Research Sally Rockey, Ph.D., on stage for an original song written to the tune of the Beatles' "We Can Work It Out." Addressed to Congress, the song reinforced the NIH message that advancing biomedical research is a national priority that deserves nonpartisan support.

Collins had to leave to make a meeting with President Obama before introductions of Institute and Center (IC) leaders seated on stage and presentation of awards. In his absence, the awards were presented by NIH Principal Deputy Director Lawrence Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D., and representatives of the lead IC for each initiative.

DNTP Biomolecular Screening Branch (BSB) Chief [Raymond Tice, Ph.D.](#), and Genetic Toxicology Group lead [Kristine Witt](#) each received two awards. BSB research fellow [Jui-Hua Hsieh, Ph.D.](#), was the youngest NIEHS scientist honored and the sole trainee.



Winners from the DREAM Toxicogenetics Challenge team are, from left, are Tice, Woychik, Boyles, Witt, and Dearry. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



NIEHS Tox21 group winners also came together for a group photo. Seated, from left, are Bucher, Tice, Birnbaum, and DeVito. Standing, from left, are Hsieh, Shockley, Witt, Fostel, and Waidyanatha. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



1/6

Collins described the year at NIH as a mix of the good, the bad, and the ugly, as employees succeeded in coping with the shutdown and sequestration, while still performing beyond expectations to serve patients and advance science. (Photo courtesy of Mike Branson)



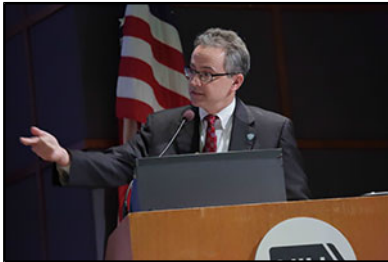
2/6

Burklow, left, Rockey, and Collins called themselves the Doo-Woppers. Although Collins made fun of the group's musical talents, Rockey's soprano vocals clearly stood out. (Photo courtesy of Mike Branson)



3/6

Birnbaum accepted the award for the Tox21 group from NCATS Director Christopher Austin, M.D., center, and Tabak. (Photo courtesy of Mike Branson)



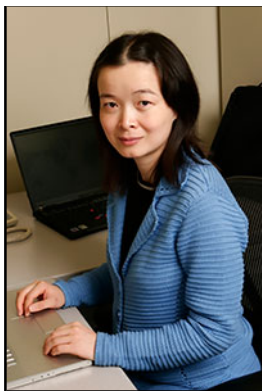
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After he finished reading the awards, Burklow joked about an invitation for guests to enjoy refreshments in the space somewhat pretentiously described as the dining room. "It's really just a cafeteria," he said. (Photo courtesy of Mike Branson)



5/6

Field is an information technology specialist in the NIEHS Computer Technology Branch. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



6/6

Li is lead researcher in the NIEHS Metabolism, Genes, and Environment Group, where she and her colleagues investigate the role of sirtuin proteins in aging. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

And the winners were...

NIEHS-NCATS-UNC DREAM Toxicogenetics Challenge Team

In recognition of significant contributions to the NIEHS-NCATS-UNC Dream Challenge (see [story](#)), the first crowdsourcing collaboration for analysis of high content data - Rebecca Boyles; Allen Dearry, Ph.D.; Tice; Witt; and Richard Woychik, Ph.D.

Tox21 Team, led by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS)

In recognition of extraordinary vision, effort, creativity, and scientific leadership during the implementation of the Toxicology in the 21st Century ([Tox21](#))

(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/news/newsletter/2012/1/spotlight-tox21/file56736.pdf>)

interagency effort - Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D.; John Bucher, Ph.D.; Michael DeVito, Ph.D.; Jennifer Fostel, Ph.D.; Hsieh; Keith Shockley, Ph.D.; Tice; Suramya Waidyanatha, Ph.D., and Witt.

Remote Support Working Group, led by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

For the evaluation and piloting of a remote support technology at NIH - Jack Field.

Geroscience Summit Organizing Committee, led by the National Institute on Aging

For dedication and commitment in promoting geroscience, specifically in organizing the multi-disciplinary scientific summit "[Advances in Geroscience: Impact on Healthspan and Chronic Disease](#)"

(<http://www.nia.nih.gov/about/links/2014/01/advances-geroscience-meeting-examines-intersection-chronic-disease-and-aging>)

- Xiaoling Li, Ph.D.

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